

Committee on Resources

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**STATEMENT OF JEFFREY COPP
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**U.S. IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY
REGARDING A HEARING ON**

“Border Security on Federal Lands: the importance of securing the Northern Border”

BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about the unique challenges that U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) of the Department of Homeland Security faces on the Northern border. My name is Jeffrey Copp and I am the Special Agent in Charge of the ICE office in Denver. In addition to Colorado, the Denver office covers a significant area of the northern border and has sub-offices in Montana, Idaho, and Wyoming.

Among the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) law enforcement agencies, ICE has the most expansive investigative authority and the largest force of investigators. Our mission is to protect the American people by combating terrorists and other criminals who cross the Nation's borders and threaten us here at home. The men and women of ICE accomplish this by investigating and enforcing the Nation's immigration and customs laws. Working overseas, along the Nation's borders, and throughout the Nation's interior, ICE agents and officers are demonstrating that the merged customs and immigration authorities constitute an effective mechanism to identify, disrupt, and dismantle criminal organizations that violate the Nation's borders and the Nation's customs and immigration laws. Using these combined authorities, ICE has built a robust enforcement program along the borders and within the Nation's interior. It remains DHS's view, however, that effectively dealing with illegal immigration requires a comprehensive approach that combines border security measures, stronger interior enforcement, a new temporary worker program, a resolution of the status of illegal immigrants already in the country, and assimilation measures that honor the great tradition of this country as a melting pot.

By leveraging the full enforcement potential provided by our unique blend of customs and immigration authorities, ICE agents and officers – together with our DHS and other federal counterparts and with the assistance of state, local, and tribal law enforcement entities - are making it more difficult for potential terrorists and transnational criminal groups to move themselves, their supporters, or their weapons across the Nation's borders through traditional human, drug, contraband, or financial smuggling networks, routes, and methods.

The Northern border of the United States is notably different from our border with Mexico. It has rugged terrain, sparse population, and a more open border. To bolster Northern border enforcement efforts, the U.S. and Canadian Governments developed the Integrated Border Enforcement Team (IBET) in 1996. IBET is a multi-agency law enforcement team that harmonizes U.S. and Canadian efforts to target cross-border criminal activity. The IBET concept originally began when law enforcement agencies from British Columbia and the state of Washington worked together on cross-border criminal activity. Between 1996 and 1999, IBET grew from two to more than 20 individuals from four different agencies. Formalized in April 2001, IBET currently works in 15 regions, with IBET officers in 23 locations across the Northern U.S. border. Partnerships are vital to the IBET framework. Personnel from participating agencies use an integrated approach to their activities, which ensures joint coordination of law enforcement and intelligence sharing.

A good example of cross-border cooperation within the IBET structure is Operation FROZEN TIMBER, a joint ICE, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, and IBET investigative operation that targets a Canadian drug smuggling organization based in the Lower Mainland of British Columbia. The smugglers have utilized helicopters to transport drugs, bulk cash, and firearms into and out of National Forest and

National Park lands in Washington State.

Operation FROZEN TIMBER aims to disrupt and dismantle these Canadian smuggling organizations through seizures, arrests, and prosecutions, and to thwart the efforts of others using helicopters to smuggle contraband into the United States. ICE is accomplishing this through extensive intelligence collection, analysis, and exploitation; technical and physical surveillance; undercover and enforcement operations; and prosecution of violators.

The National Forest and National Park lands that these organizations use provide multiple landing sites for helicopters, where discovery is difficult because of the remote, mountainous, and forested nature of the terrain.

The targets of this investigation, most of whom are Canadian citizens with aircraft registered in Canada, are involved in a conspiracy that falls within both the Eastern and Western judicial districts of the State of Washington. Furthermore, the investigation has revealed 13 helicopters suspected of being used for smuggling. The ultimate distribution point for the smuggled narcotics is the Western District of Washington and the Interstate 5 Corridor in Oregon and California.

During the initial phase of Operation FROZEN TIMBER, U.S. and Canadian law enforcement agencies intercepted more than 17 drug loads, including one shipment in February 2005 consisting of five suitcases packed with more than 337 pounds of cocaine. This shipment constituted the largest single cocaine seizure in Washington State last year. Another significant seizure came in September 2005, when agents followed two couriers to a residence and recovered more than 1,100 pounds of marijuana.

More recently, in May 2006, ICE agents tracked a Bell Jet Ranger helicopter from Canada to a landing site in a remote wildlife area in Washington State. After witnessing the cargo being transferred to a waiting pickup truck, our agents, along with officers from the U.S. Forest Service and a local drug task force, stopped the vehicle, arrested two men inside, and recovered 329 pounds of marijuana. When the helicopter arrived back in Canada, the RCMP arrested the two Canadian pilots.

Since Operation FROZEN TIMBER began in November 2004, 46 individuals have been arrested. U.S. and Canadian law enforcement agencies have seized approximately 8,000 pounds of marijuana, 800 pounds of cocaine, three aircraft, and \$1.5 million in U.S. currency.

While the vast majority of smuggling activity we combat today involves an array of traditional criminal threats, illegal businesses are evolving in dangerous ways. The violators are better armed and more willing to use force. The stakes are getting higher as we continue to strengthen the barriers against such activity. Because terrorists could potentially exploit this criminal activity and use border vulnerabilities to enter or attack the United States, the need to combat these threats through enforcement efforts like Operation FROZEN TIMBER is greater than ever.

Although ICE is a new agency, we aggressively apply our unified immigration and customs authorities to identify and address vulnerabilities affecting the borders and the Nation's homeland and national security. At the same time, we bring to this effort the best of our former agencies' expertise, cultures, and techniques as we continue to improve the efficiency of this new federal law enforcement agency. In case after case, ICE agents, officers, analysts, and other personnel are putting into practice, on behalf of the American people, the powerful advantages that flow from our unified authorities. The result is a strong and growing contribution to the Nation's border, homeland and national security.

We know the threats and we know the risks. Only through vigorous enforcement efforts against those who seek to use the Nation's borders against U.S. citizens can we ensure the security of the Homeland.

The men and women of ICE are grateful for the chance to serve the American people and, on their behalf, I thank you and your colleagues for your continued support of our operations. I hope my remarks today have been helpful and informative. Thank you for inviting me, and I would be glad to answer any questions you may have at this time.